The Appearing and Revealment of Jesus Christ

"Looking for the blessed hope and the appearing of the glory of our great God and Savior, Christ Jesus."
—Titus 2:13, *New American Standard Version*

A TRAGIC SENSE OF LOSS must have filled the hearts of the disciples when Jesus, having appeared to them for the last time before his ascension, suddenly departed, and in a manner which left no doubt that the short seasons of fellowship they had been enjoying with him subsequent to his resurrection had come an end. Two angels then appeared to them. "While they looked stedfastly toward heaven as he went up, behold, two men stood by them in white apparel; Which also said, Ye men of Galilee, why stand ye gazing up into heaven? this same Jesus, which is taken up from you into heaven, shall so come in like manner as ye have seen him go into heaven." (Acts 1:10,11) This gave them assurance that he would one day return, yet they knew that for the time

being they must carry on without the help of his personal presence.

THE BLESSED HOPE

Under these circumstances, and because they realized that all they hoped for in and through him would not be realized until he did return, his coming again took on an aspect of tremendous importance to them. Christ's return and coming kingdom, together with their hope for a share in his kingdom, was indeed a blessed hope. In fact, it was the center of all their hopes. Just as Paul reasoned that if there were no resurrection of the dead the Christian's faith and preaching are vain, so it would be if Christ did not return; for it was after his return that the promised resurrection of the dead, of both the church and the world, was to take place.

THE FALLING AWAY

Paul wrote of a general falling away from the faith before Christ's promised return could be realized. In his second letter to the Thessalonian brethren, he emphasized, "We beseech you, brethren, by the coming [Greek, *parousia*—presence] of our Lord Jesus Christ, and by our gathering together unto him, That ye be not soon shaken in mind, or be troubled, neither by spirit, nor by word, nor by letter as from us, as that the day of Christ is at hand. Let no man deceive you by any means: for that day shall not come, except there come a falling away first, and that man of sin be revealed, the son of perdition."—II Thess. 2:1-3

The hope of Jesus' return had already begun to lose its significance, and ultimately ceased to be a vital factor in the lives of many of the early Christians.

But the misguided efforts of man had not changed the Divine plan concerning the return of Christ and the establishment of his future millennial kingdom. Those who had faith in God's promises took him at his word, and this aspect of his plan was still of fundamental importance to them.

DARK AGE TEACHINGS

For many centuries during the Middle Ages, the Bible was virtually buried in darkness and dead languages. During this period, many false ideas and theories developed that pertained to God's ultimate design toward his human creation. When the Bible began to be translated into the languages of the common people, these distorted views, many of which were based on careless translation and misguided error, considerably influenced those honest-hearted people who were endeavoring to learn the Truth from God's Word. An example of this confusion may be found in the English translation of the Hebrew word *sheol* which is found in the Old Testament, and the Greek word *hades* which is used in the New Testament. Both of these Bible words, in their respective languages, simply mean the state of death, and not an eternal condemnation to the flames of hell.

In many instances, these and other words were carelessly translated in a manner that has led to much misunderstanding of the Word of God. In some cases, the translators attempted to support some of the traditional ideas and theories of their time concerning the condition of the dead, with God-dishonoring teachings such as eternal torture. Our loving Heavenly Father was thus seen as a vengeful God, and one to be feared.

A SPIRIT OF REVIVAL

After the upheaval that had occurred between church and state during the period of the French Revolution, there began to be a revival of what once had been the greatest of all hopes among the early Christians. At that time, there began to be increasing interest and anticipation concerning the Word of God, and the long-promised return of Christ to earth. Christian people everywhere began to study the prophetic scriptures with a new sense of freedom that was relative to the approaching time of Jesus' Second Advent.

This was a time when Bible societies began to make the Scriptures available to the common people for the first time, and in their own languages. It also coincided with new educational systems that were established to provide general education for the young people. Eventually, it became mandatory on a large scale. People from all walks of life were able to read the precious Word of God, and to reflect upon the wonderful prophecies that were contained therein, and especially those pertaining to the Second Advent of our Lord. There was a great spirit of revival, and a sense of anticipation in many places, especially in America.

THE SECOND ADVENT

During the nineteenth century, God's earnest people began to look more closely at the teachings of the established church systems. Emphasis became centered on the Second Coming of Christ, and they proclaimed it widely. The effect of the unscriptural concepts became apparent when compared with the prophecies concerning the real meaning and

purpose of our Lord's return. The earlier translators had not brought to light important Bible truths that were relative to the subject of a Second Presence of our Lord. For example, the Greek word *parousia*, had been translated by our English word 'coming,' instead of emphasizing its true meaning—'presence.' This mistranslation had thus made it impossible to harmonize the true meaning and purpose of Christ's return.

CHRIST'S PRESENCE

The Greek word *parousia* [presence], to which we have given reference, is used twice in the New Testament where it does not apply to Jesus but to the Apostle Paul. These uses of the word when examined carefully will readily establish its true meaning.

In the first instance, Paul, in his second letter to the Corinthian brethren, expresses what other men's appraisal of him had been. He says, "His letters, say they, are weighty and powerful; but his bodily presence [*parousia*] is weak." (II Cor. 10:10) Again, when writing to the saints at Philippi, Paul says, "My beloved, as ye have always obeyed, not as in my presence [*parousia*] only, but now much more in my absence, work out your own salvation with fear and trembling."—Phil. 2:12

It can be seen at once that the use of the word 'coming' to translate the Greek word *parousia* in either of these foregoing texts would have given an entirely wrong meaning to express Paul's thoughts. In both of these scriptures, it is the apostle's presence, and not his coming, that he was emphasizing. He was not discussing his coming, or arrival, with them, but his actual bodily presence. We need only to reason on these two very understandable examples

of the true meaning of the Greek word *parousia*. This will be beneficial when comparing the word with other texts that use the same word *parousia* in connection with Christ's Second Presence.

THE SIGN OF JESUS' PRESENCE

The first time the word *parousia* is used in the New Testament prophecies is in the twenty-fourth chapter of Matthew's Gospel. In this text, the disciples came to Jesus asking him about the destruction of the Temple which he had previously spoken to them about. "As he sat upon the mount of Olives, the disciples came unto him privately, saying, Tell us, when shall these things be? and what shall be the sign of thy coming [*parousia*], and of the end of the world [consummation of the age—*Wilson's Emphatic Diaglott*]?" (Matt. 24:3) Here the word *parousia* has been mistranslated 'coming,' instead of presence. It is also noted that this event takes place at the end of the Gospel Age, and is not, therefore, the end of the world.

In Jesus' response to his disciples' question, he outlines many events that will take place in the world during the intervening Gospel Age, but then gives the evidence of his actual presence at the end, or harvest period, of the age. He answers, "As the lightning cometh out of the east, and shineth even unto the west; so shall also the coming [*parousia*—presence] of the Son of man be." (vs. 27) Jesus used light as a symbol to identify his presence at the end of the age. He was not speaking about his coming, but his actual presence. The watchers would be the first to be blessed by the enlightenment of his presence. The world of mankind will be blessed under the administration of Christ's future kingdom.

The word *parousia* has again been used in an important text. It reads, "As in Adam all die, even so in Christ shall all be made alive. But every man in his own order: Christ the firstfruits; afterward they that are Christ's at his coming [*parousia*—presence]." (I Cor. 15:22,23) Here the reference is to the appointed time of Christ's Second Presence. During his first presence on earth, he had redeemed the human family from the death sentence inherited by Adam. During the time of his second presence, all mankind will ultimately be given opportunity to receive everlasting life.

PETER'S TESTIMONY

Another interesting use of the Greek word *parousia* is by the Apostle Peter, where he says, "We have not followed cunningly devised fables, when we made known unto you the power and coming [*parousia*] of our Lord Jesus Christ, but were eyewitnesses of his majesty." (II Pet. 1:16) Peter is referring to his experience on the Mount of Transfiguration, when, together with James and John, he saw Christ transfigured before them. In that vision, it wasn't Jesus coming that he saw, but his presence. He was there with them, and Peter uses the word *parousia*, mistranslated 'coming,' to describe this blessed experience. Peter uses this experience on the Mount of Transfiguration as an illustration of the grander power and majesty that Jesus will exercise during his future thousand-year kingdom.

THE SCOFFERS

Peter uses the word *parousia* again when, discussing the subject of Christ's presence, he writes, "Knowing this first, that there shall come in the

last days scoffers, walking after their own lusts, And saying, Where is the promise of his coming [*parousia*]? for since the fathers fell asleep, all things continue as they were from the beginning of the creation." (II Pet. 3:3,4) Scoffers have not questioned the fact that the Bible promises the return of Christ, which is the implication of this scripture. Yet, the misuse of the word *parousia*, translated 'coming' instead of presence, leads to confusion. The question raised by the scoffers is whether or not we can believe that Christ has returned, and is present, since everything in the world, as they see it, seems to be going along as usual.

THE BRIGHT SHINING

Another Greek word used in conjunction with Christ's promised return is *epiphania*, which means manifestation, or bright shining. It is used in various prophecies which directly, or indirectly, refer to the manifestation of the fact that the Lord is present. As an example of the use of this word, we read, "Then shall that Wicked be revealed, whom the Lord shall consume with the spirit of his mouth, and shall destroy with the brightness [*epiphania*] of his coming [*parousia*]." (II Thess.2:8) The Wicked one referred to in this text is Satan and his great Antichrist system—the mystery of iniquity. It is a system that came into being during the Dark Ages through the union of church and state. It is not merely a false church, but the illicit union of the false church with civil power. This union, it was claimed, was the kingdom of Christ on earth.

Paul explains that this system would be destroyed by the 'bright shining' [Greek, *epiphania*] of Christ's

presence [Greek, *parousia*]. This describes the affect that the light will have on all unrighteousness. Under the administration of Christ's kingdom, the light will ultimately destroy all powers of darkness and false ideologies that have influenced mankind. The people will become more and more enlightened with the Truth so that eventually the power of ignorance, superstition, and error will be completely removed from the earth. The Prophet Isaiah describes this wonderful time. He says, "The earth shall be full of the knowledge of the LORD, as the waters cover the sea."—Isa. 11: 9

THE WATCHERS

Great blessings are promised to those who are watching for the promised presence of our Lord. We read, "Blessed are those servants, whom the lord when he cometh shall find watching: verily I say unto you, that he shall gird himself, and make them to sit down to meat, and will come forth and serve them." (Luke 12:37) Here is confirmation of the enlightenment that would reveal Jesus' Second Presence to the children of God. Only his own true people would be blessed and know about it. The household of faith is served "their portion of meat in due season." (vs. 42) The watchers are the first to be enlightened by his return, whereas the world of mankind will be blessed under the administration of Christ's future kingdom.

MEAT IN DUE SEASON

The 'meat in due season' has been provided as a special blessing for these watchers at the end of the age. Meat is used in the Scriptures as a symbol of truth. It is the Truth of God's plans and purposes

that has been hidden from the worldly wise and is revealed to the watchers during the closing years of this present Gospel Age. In the above reference, the thought is given that the meat would be served in due season—seasonable to the time in which it was revealed. The Apostle Peter presents a similar thought. He says, "I will not be negligent to put you always in remembrance of these things, though ye know them, and be established in the present truth."—II Pet. 1:12

The glorious heavenly hope was not offered to the people of God prior to the First Advent of Christ. In the plan of God, this glorious prize was to be offered to those willing to suffer and die with the Master, being inspired to do so by the hope of living and reigning with him in his kingdom. Great stress was laid upon this hope by the apostles, and it captivated the minds and hearts of all the true believers in the Early Church. However, they did not overlook the fact that the Divine plan also provided a hope of life on the earth for all mankind, and that this feature of the Divine purpose would become operative during that future time.

Since the hope of the kingdom applied to a future age it was but natural that it should be more and more overlooked by the Lord's people after the apostles fell asleep. The hope that the world of mankind would be restored to human perfection on the earth following the return of Christ was soon almost completely ignored, and it became buried and hidden by human ideologies and traditions during the Dark Ages. For the Lord's true saints throughout the age, the heavenly hope continued to shine. It may have lost some of its lustre during a darker time, but it was still a glorious hope to *(Continued on page 35)*

(Continued from page 31) the children of the kingdom who stood alone among the overwhelming number of tares, which, as a result of Satan's planting, had grown up around them.

APOKALUPSIS

The wonderful promises, and manner in which the Lord enlightens his people by his presence, is shown by the Apostle Peter in his first epistle, which was written about 30 years after Jesus' earthly ministry. Here, Peter uses another Greek word, *apokalupsis,* to strengthen his point. "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, which according to his abundant mercy hath begotten us again unto a lively hope by the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, To an inheritance incorruptible, and undefiled, and that fadeth not away, reserved in heaven for you [for us, *Marginal Translation*], Who are kept by the power of God through faith unto salvation ready to be revealed [Greek, *apokalupto*] in the last time."—I Pet. 1:3-5

This passage emphasizes the depth of love and appreciation that the apostle had for the great hope that was within him. His use of the Greek word *apokalupto* [revealment] points to those children of God who are being kept by his great power, and that all promises will be revealed to them at the end of this present age of sacrifice.

He further says, "Of which salvation the prophets have inquired and searched diligently, who prophesied of the grace that should come unto you: Searching what, or what manner of time the Spirit of Christ which was in them did signify, when it testified beforehand the sufferings of Christ, and the glory that should follow. Unto whom it was revealed [Greek,

apokalupto], that not unto themselves, but unto us they did minister the things, which are now reported unto you by them that have preached the gospel unto you with the Holy Spirit [mistranslated Ghost] sent down from heaven; which things the angels desire to look into."—vss. 10-12

The children of God have been especially blessed by the appearing and revealment of our Lord Jesus Christ during the closing years of this Gospel Age. Truths that were kept secret for many centuries were unlocked to the watchers. As a further admonition, we read the Apostle Peter's encouraging words, "Gird up the loins of your mind, be sober, and hope to the end for the grace that is to be brought unto you at the revelation [*apokalupsis*] of Jesus Christ."—vs. 13■